

kumur mārnda exchange, gave me the following list of *gerri* which he received from each of the five quarters of *kumur*²⁸ which form the horizon of his exchange cycle. 431 439

(1) *Kumur miwait*, (east). *Kaiyit*²⁹ (iron headed spears) and the round black pounding stones used throughout Arnhem Land, especially for pulverising *nätu*, (*Cycas* fruit). This stone, which comes from the English Company's Islands, is called *poipuro* by groups as widely separated linguistically as Kopapoino (and the allied Tjämbarpoino) on the one hand, and Mildjiñi on the other. Sometimes *nāmbi lirra* (flint spear heads), which form the most characteristic of the *gerri* from *kumur djalk*, to which they give their name, may, as has been indicated above, reach a man in North Central Arnhem Land (e.g. a man of Mildjiñi clan of the Lower Glyde River) by an easterly route via the roving Ritar'no people, thence along the southern side of Buckingham Bay. 411 412

²⁸ Mildjiñi use the same name for these groups, but the actual word *kumur* (sternum) becomes *biri* in this language. [192]

²⁹ The natives of Caledon, Trial and Blue Mud Bays, on the Gulf of Carpentaria, have acquired much skill in the making of *kaiyit*, and the manufacture of fine spear heads has become almost an industry at Trial Bay. Even before I actually entered Arnhem Land I had been surprised to obtain on the Roper River, iron headed (so-called "shovel") spears from Woodah Island, Blue Mud Bay. I found it difficult to understand why iron spear heads should be passing down to the Roper from Blue Mud Bay, where there was no white settlement, where contacts even by sea were few, and iron relatively scarce and highly valued, into country where cattle stations had long been established and where iron was relatively easy to get. But the explanation of this was found later, in the discovery in Northern Arnhem Land of the existence of the ceremonial exchange cycle, which supplies the motive force for the great movements of *gerri* over distances of hundreds of miles, of which this is a part, and to which impetus was given by the coming 182 177 431 439

by repeated intervention of the Australian Customs Authorities after Federation. The Indonesian influence in Arnhem Land, therefore, probably extended over a period of nearly two hundred years, perhaps much longer. Although there is no conclusive evidence as to the time when these visits commenced; there is reason for the belief that they occurred over a relatively long period, and a study of the culture shows that the visitors from Indonesia exercised a strong influence on the people. This is apparent in their material culture, and to an even greater extent in their social and ceremonial life and mythology. I have mentioned (page 71, footnote) my surprise at finding in settled country on the Roper River, even before I entered the then isolated country of Arnhem Land, fine iron spear heads from Blue Mud Bay, an area where iron was still difficult to obtain and much coveted. The natives of this region have been suspected of attacking *bêche-de-mer* and other craft merely for the iron in the water tanks and trepang boilers, from which, by a laborious process of hammering and grinding, they manufacture fine spear heads. This was in 1935, when I had been sent by the Commonwealth Government to investigate unrest and tribal fighting in Arnhem Land. The people of Caledon and Blue Mud Bays were regarded as warlike and aggressive and were still greatly feared by the natives to the south, with whom they had little contact and who would not have entered their territory.

Subsequent work in Arnhem Land revealed the existence of the great ceremonial exchange cycle which has been described in detail on page 67 above. But while the *kumur mārnda* relationship exists throughout the whole of Arnhem Land, and while the ceremonial exchange cycle draws *gerri* from far beyond this region, there is evidence for the belief that it was the visits of Macassar voyagers, who

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224 I found their methods of kangaroo hunting to be the most interesting of all, and I know the men would agree with this estimate. Kangaroos are comparatively easy prey during the wet season, when long grass covers the hillsides. A hunter often smears white clay over his head, for clay is an effective camouflage, and a man so daubed is scarcely distinguishable from burnt-off tree stumps with their occasional unburnt patches of white. The big hunt is carefully planned, and there are intricate methods for driving, ambushing, and trapping kangaroos when the rains are over and the herbage is dry. Wide valleys or plains are selected for the hunt, and a patch is burnt out in the centre. Meanwhile, three or four men run a wide circle of fire around the burnt-out area, and hunters with spears and firesticks light many fires inside the outer wall of smoke and gradually close in toward the centre, leaving behind them a wall of roaring flames and blinding smoke which terrifies and drives all the small animals, reptiles, and kangaroos into the central death-trap where they are speared.

225 Most Arnhem Land Yulengor hunt for sea-food both on shore and from canoes. Metal has been filtering into the country for two centuries, and this has made hunting easier.

[177] Once they fished with pronged hardwood spears and made wooden harpoons for the soft-skinned green turtle, dugong,

● [325] and porpoise, but they now grind metal harpoons that are able to pierce even the hard carapace of the shell-back turtle. For turtle hunting, a harpoon is tied to bush rope and fitted into the end of a long spear haft, and when a turtle is sighted on the surface the canoe is paddled quietly toward it with a man standing in the bow ready for the strike.

[411] Dugong are hunted at night, and canoes skim around the sea-grass feeding-grounds till an animal is sighted and harpooned. The flesh resembles pork, and the animals sometimes measure up to twelve feet in length and weigh half a

136 ton. A dugong suckles her calf while clasping it to her with

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Arts, Crafts, and Camp-Songs

325. A STONE AGE hunter, in nature's garb, carrying a handful of hunting spears, stood looking at the sparks from my forge. He was in from the hills behind Caledon Bay, and pointing to a short length of metal lying by the anvil, he said: 'Please give me iron.' He wanted it for a spearhead. A week later I saw the finished weapon. With infinite patience he had pounded it with percussion stones and an old tomahawk, then ground and smoothed it till it had a razor-like edge and a surface with neither dent nor ripple.

Not having discovered the use of metals for himself, the nomad lives in the Stone Age; though why this should be so, when Australia is rich in ores, is another of the mysteries of this race. Tools-of-trade have not developed beyond the Stone Age; they are still chipped from stone, sharp shells, bone, and wood, and with these crude implements the nomads supply their simple needs of spears, dilly-bags, string, beautifully painted and decorated totems, armlets, waist-bands, and corselets.

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177 However, these materials are now giving way to introduced metals. First knowledge of metal came in the seventeenth century, when European sailors visited the coast of Arnhem Land and brought aborigines into touch with metal weapons. Macassars, white traders, Japanese, adventurers, and missionaries have since visited this coastline, and of all their possessions the nomads prize most their knives, axes, and metal ware. Luggers have been raided and wrecks burnt for the metal in them. Trepang fishermen brought old railway lines to support fish-curing-boilers, and when these were later discarded it was not beyond aboriginal

ARTS, CRAFTS, AND CAMP-SONGS

ingenuity to cut and pound them into spear-heads, knives, 325●
and digging-bars. The majority of spears in Arnhem Land 197
are now made from some kind of metal. Galvanized water- [411]
piping, and copper and brass fittings from wrecks, are
pounded into shape; discarded fuel drums are beaten into
knives and spears; nails from floating boxes are sharpened
and bent into fishing hooks and harpoons.

Spears are frequently broken, lost, or given away, and 411
consequently nomads are always looking for new spear-hafts.
At least twenty varieties are made from wood and stone;
the horror in primitive warfare is a spearhead made from a [237]
bunch of stingray barbs. Old-time fighting and hunting
spears are cut from twelve-foot strips of hardwood and are [322]
shaved and smoothed with shells and sharp stones. Spears
are seldom naturally straight; the kinks are eliminated by
passing them backwards and forwards through a fire. Later
they are painted and stabbed upright in the sand beside
a wind-break, where they are ready for instant use.

In emergencies spears are made very quickly from the
simplest materials. I remember we had a rough trip in
heavy seas and blinding rain, till we found shelter behind the
Wessel Island, where the boys went ashore to hunt for food.
Spears had been washed overboard, and I wondered how
they intended to hunt. About dusk they returned with two
stingrays and a small shark. I asked how they had caught
them, and I was told simply: 'I dived and caught them in
my hands.' When the fish were cooking on the coals, the
young hunter turned his attention to a few rusty nails in a
piece of driftwood; he removed them and straightened them
in his teeth. He tied them to the end of a straight stick, and
called it a spear. Next morning he caught four two-pound
fish with his stick and nails.

Spears are thrown from a 'mangal' or spear-thrower, a